

How Can a Man Be Just with God?

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[0:00] Last week we began the next and crucial phase, one of the crucial phases of our study of salvation in God's way, by examining the great doctrine of justification by faith.

By the end of our lesson, we had not yet defined the doctrine of justification, and I promised to do that this evening. And there's all kinds of variations of this, but justification by faith is a declaration that a person has been restored to a state of righteousness through belief and trust in the work of Christ, rather than on the basis of one's own accomplishment.

I've heard it also described as a legal declaration.

We could do that and go for another year, but we won't. This is a fundamental, important question. This is kind of where we've been headed. How can a man be just with God? Just think about that. You know your background.

[2:00] You know how God views you. You know how God viewed you before He saved you. How can a man be just with God?

How can a man be right with the Holy One? But the question is simply not that simple.

In fact, it's really quite complicated. It is much more than how can a man be just with God. It is how can a sinful man be just with God?

And when we incorporate the word sinful, the question takes on a whole new feature. How does one restore a relationship with God after sinning?

Can we ever get back to the garden? There used to be a song, We just need to get back to the garden. Now they made no mention of Christ in the garden with them.

[3:05] But can we ever get back to the garden where we can walk in the cool of the evening with the second person of the Trinity? Can we ever get back to the garden before the incident with the forbidden fruit?

And we must not understate the use of the word sin or sinful. In the final analysis, sin is always against God.

The essence of sin is to be against God. In opposition to God or even, it means in opposition to God or even at war with God.

And I've heard that term. Any person who is against God at some point in their life cannot be right with God.

The two are mutually exclusive. To better explain this, let's harken back in time to one of our very first lessons in the series, which began September of 2018.

[4:11] And I drew a picture on the board sort of like that one. That's sort of a circle. I'm glad my geometry teacher is not here. But I drew a picture up there somewhat like this one.

And I said at that time, inside that circle is every person who's ever committed even one sin.

Just picture them as being in there. And that means every person who ever lived, every person who's ever, who is presently alive, every person who will ever live, is in the circle.

The only person not in this circle was the Lord Jesus Christ, the unique God-man. All the rest of us are in the circle. Now there was a time when Adam and Eve were not in the circle.

Remember that? And then Satan is the serpent, forbidden fruit. We know the story. And they went in the circle.

[5:16] And everyone that's flowed from them is in the circle. We are, or we were, in the circle because we have in fact sinned. And the essence of sin is to be against God.

It's enmity with God. The person who is against God cannot be right with God and nor can he make himself right with God, although religion tries all the time.

It strives to make themselves right with God, to clean themselves up. But we know that sin, even one sin, creates separation from that which is ultimately holy.

So that which is unholy is separated from ultimate holiness. Now, bear with me on this next point and please do not storm the castle with pitchforks and burning torches.

Anyone who's against God, God's against them. Most people are repelled at such a thought as that, but how can it be otherwise? The scriptures say that because of sin present in our life, we are at enmity with God.

[6:32] Our brother in Christ, Noah Webster, known for writing the dictionary, defines enmity like this. Enmity is the quality of being an enemy. It is the opposite of friendship.

It is ill will. It is hatred. It is possessing an unfriendly disposition. Webster then goes on, and he did this in his original dictionary, offering quotations from the Bible to support his definition.

And he gives two in that definition, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. In Genesis 3:15, he says, God says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. And by the way, that is the first prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament verse says, Romans 8:7, because the carnal man is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.

That's the carnal mind. Sin is a contradiction of God. His perfection requires that he recoils against all ungodliness, however minor, and we may conclude such ungodliness what it is.

[8:02] There is a Bible word for all of this concerning God and it's called wrath. He has wrath for people that behave in an ungodly manner.

This is what the Holy Scriptures say. The Holy Spirit wrote this in Romans 1:18, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and all unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

That's Paul in Romans 1:18. And that's a frightening passage. It uses the word all ungodliness and all unrighteousness.

One sin placed our original parents in a state of unrighteousness and separation from God.

Everyone who came from them, and that's everyone, was in this state of sin and under the wrath of God.

In each of us is the sin nature we adopted from our original parents. That is mankind's relationship with the eternal God of the universe revealed in the three persons of the Trinity.

[9:22] Now let me add to our previous question. having been tainted with the stain of sin, how can an ungodly and unrighteous man be right with God?

And the answer is he can't. He can't. He tries. He creates religions. Adam and Eve created the first religion. Fig leaf religion. If we sow these fig leaves on, we'll once again be acceptable to God.

We won't be naked anymore. Of course, when they approached God, he said, well, who told you you were naked? He asked Adam, who told you you were naked? And Adam says, panic, panic time, you know.

And then the Lord said, have you eaten of the fruit I forbid you to eat from? And Adam was a man's man. He said, the woman you gave me, and in that statement, what did Adam do?

Blame the woman and blame God for giving him a defective model. But here we see the Lord Jesus saying, did you eat of that fruit?

[10:31] Well, the woman you gave me, she caused me to eat. There is nothing a lost man or a lost woman can do to make themselves right with God. In fact, when we lived in this circle, we were all wrong with him.

And why is this? Because we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. That's Romans 3:23. Sin places us in the circle.

But aside from that, as an aside rather, but in the spirit of accuracy, we can actually say, and again, don't rush the stadium with pitchforks, that we're actually born into that circle.

We really are. Babies are born with a sin nature. It doesn't take long to see that. I'm around my young granddaughters. Oh man, I'll tell you what. But then, this begs a question, and I want to put you at ease.

What happens then to a baby that dies? Well, I can tell you what happens. Go straight to heaven. Go straight to heaven.

[11:41] I don't have any doubt about that. of such is the kingdom of God. Christ said that. While babies and young children have a sin nature, they have nothing against them that is charged as sin before God at that age.

I mean, I've got a two-week-old granddaughter, and she's not been charged with any sin, I can assure you, not by God and not by her grandfather.

Their slate is clean and their young life has not yet manifested sin that can be held against them. Now, when does that happen? Everybody's different on that. I don't know. I know Dr. Criswell would not baptize anyone until they were 12 years old.

That was his position. But this isn't true of us, is it? Fallen man fails to grasp the gravity of the situation.

He refuses to acknowledge the reality of sin and the reality that wrath is upon him in his fallenness. In his fallenness.

[12:52] And because fallen man, unsaved man, has no understanding of the sin that so grips them, neither can they understand the great provision of justification by faith.

I hope all this reminds you of a previous lesson when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. And remember, the Lord had quite a conversation when this is all connected to that.

Within the lost heart of a man, devoid of the Spirit, the concept of justification rings no bells. I do want to add that man is without excuse as to the existence of God. No one's going to stand before God and say, I didn't know you were there. Creation cries out that there is a God. Creation itself cries out. I've heard from missionaries that make contact with unreached tribes, South America, Africa, Asia. And over time, they get familiar, they get comfortable, and they witness.

[14:07] and I'll never forget, more than one has said, I always knew He was there when I'd look up at night, but I didn't know His name. That's an amazing thing.

But listen to the Holy Spirit, Romans 1, 18 to 20. We've already read the first verse. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived. Could we say clearly revealed? I think so. Ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made, so they are without excuse.

They are without excuse. I love astronomy. Kind of hard to believe. Someone who can't add up to and to likes astronomy. But I've got to say, like a Carl Sagan.

[15:26] Brilliant man. And he lost God in the stars. He's without excuse. I mean, I can't imagine Dr. Sagan standing before the Lord Jesus and Jesus says, you know, I made all this.

What? You made all this? I made all this. But men reject the very truth placing their faith in things like the theory of evolution, which was really advanced by Charles Darwin who didn't have one class in biology.

What was his profession? He was a minister. He was a preacher. And a poor one. Not poor financially, but poor ability-wise.

He put forward, and it was already around, but he really advanced this theory of evolution. Having rejected the true God, justification is meaningless to the world.

It is meaningless to a vast majority of the church in the 20th and now 21st century. People have no grasp of the reality of God as creator, of his majesty, or of his holiness.

[16:44] Even within the ranks of some evangelical churches, the Lord has become less than what he really is. I've actually heard this before.

The Lord is described as our buddy up there. And I guess the one that just really is rubbing your fingernails down a blackboard. You don't know what a blackboard is, but some of us do.

He's the man upstairs. Remember that one? He's the man upstairs. We cannot possibly understand the gospel of Christ without grasping the fact that the wrath of God abides on the lost.

Such wrath has created a separation between men and God and has placed such men in a state of divine condemnation.

How many witness plans begin with the statement, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? Really? I mean, can you imagine some guy heard that once and today he finds himself in hell?

[18:00] I mean, he's got to be wondering when does this wonderful plan kick in? He's sitting there in hell. And he probably doesn't wonder that because I don't think anyone goes to hell without knowing why.

So once again, I'm going to alter our central question. So before I do, let's review them. How can a man be just with God? How can a sinful man be just with God?

How can a sinful man become just with God? Interesting question. A lost man needs a reversal in his life.

He needs a reversal. He needs to back up. It is essential that he has a reversal in his relationship with the true God who, by the way, as we all know, is revealed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The triunity of the one true God. The only hope that lost man has and the only hope saved men have is justification.

[19 : 17] justification. That's our great hope. Justification is the answer and it is only provided by God and it is only by free grace.

The Apostle Paul, the great champion of justification, made this abundantly clear in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is the book on justification. Try on this passage in Romans 8.33. It is God who justifies. That's pretty plain. It is God who justifies. This is both a moving and profound moment in our study of salvation God's way.

The passage needs to be underlined in your Bibles but more especially in your hearts. It is God who justifies. Now contrary to much teaching in the church today around the world we cannot justify ourselves.

A lot of churches teach you can. You must. Nor are we able to force God's hand and put Him in a situation where He has no alternative but to justify us.

[20 : 34] That's not going to happen. We can't put God in a box. No one can put God in a box. That box doesn't even exist.

And that should be very clear to us and I'm sure it is. Let me give you a brief list of what justification is not. Okay? It is not a process we participate in.

It's not a 50-50 proposition. It's not a 99.9 and a .1 proposition. It is not our confession.

It's not based upon good feelings induced by a confession. Justification is not a religious exercise however good and noble that may be to the individual exercising it.

If we truly want to know what justification is we must turn our hearts and minds to God. I have some more good news from the pen of the Apostle Paul writing down the words of the Spirit of God.

[21 : 46] Again Romans 8.33 God justifies. Romans 4.5 Let's go one more step. God justifies the ungodly.

Is that good news? God and you know what that means? I don't know about you guys but it means He can justify me.

I have some hope here because God justifies the ungodly. Let's go another step. Christ died for the ungodly.

Maybe that's our ultimate hope. Christ said I didn't come to save righteous men. He came to save ungodly men and that means it's possible for anybody in that circle.

If you want to see the free grace of God in action consider those passages as well as this passage Romans 3.24 we are justified by His grace now listen to this as a gift wow okay keep keep going Paul don't stop through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus I don't think I'd be in trouble to add through Christ Jesus alone because remember Christ died for the ungodly God justifies the ungodly and we learn in this passage that justification is a free gift of God's grace and is found only in the redemption that is found only in the

[23 : 44] Lord Jesus Christ how many times I've had people tell me well I believe in God I just don't believe in Jesus well you just voided that you those are you excluded that now we're going to have to give all due consideration to this next portion of our study the truth surrounding the doctrine of justification has suffered greatly at the hands of unbelieving theologians unbelieving churches and unbelieving denominations and they're all out there I used to be so naive I thought if you were a professor at a state college in the department of religion you had to be born again and then I found out none of them are born again none of them are perhaps the most significant way it is suffered is by lack of a precise explanation of justification and we're going to be talking about the precise explanation probably in the

December but I'm going to tackle it head on tonight in the few minutes we have left justification does not mean to make someone righteous I'm going to tell you guys I don't have an ounce of self righteousness in me I mean it's all sin it does not mean to make someone holy it does not mean to make someone good it does not mean to make someone upright now it is true that we are being

made holy in the image of Christ but that is the work of recreation we know a little bit about that we're going to learn a whole lot about that probably after the first of the year when we get to sanctification God begins that work at regeneration being born again born from above it starts and he carries it on through all these things we've been studying and now we're in justification and then we're going to get to sanctification the sanctification process which we'll study at a later time God is in the business of perfecting our holiness in the process and it will be ultimately perfected in the process known as glorification and by the way that will be the last topic in this series that we study sometime in the future concerning future glorification God said this beloved we are God's children now that's good news isn't it if you've been born from above born again saved regenerated you're his child right now you're not in that circle you didn't remove yourself God got you out of there we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is wow now

Wesley taught and held in perfectionism you could be perfect in this life totally without sin I had a guy tell me that at the Y when I was an FBI I used to work out believe it or not and he talked to me about that one day sitting there I didn't know who he was I got talking to him when I was through he had lost his salvation he said I gotta get saved again this Sunday I mean I just I ripped him and Wesley I'm told I've never had this verified but I'm told on his death bed he said I never achieved that and I don't think you can so I think even John Wesley there's Charles too but John I think he came around to see that perfectionism that you know that's the direction of our life but it's not going to be unto perfection in this life we can't keep the greatest commandment for 15 seconds love God with all love our neighbors as our self now we have to be really precise here there is danger lurking in the shadows there's danger lurking in the shadows we're going to be expanding on that in the next few weeks it is really the same danger and these are my words that destroyed the church at Rome as a true church established to worship God in spirit and truth justification does not refer to the renewing and sanctifying grace of God Rome believed and taught that justification was regeneration and sanctification all rolled up together that's what they believed and that's what they required everyone else to believe they did not see justification and sanctification as two separate and distinct acts of

[29 : 34] God in the salvation of a soul in ascribing to this error the great doctrine of justification by faith got swallowed up and all but disappeared from the landscape it disappeared under the Roman church and that was pretty much the church in those days the fact that the great truth of free and full justification destroyed Rome's teaching of the gospel that's the fact and let me tell you how important that is for us because that explains at least in part but it's a major part while a little humble catholic priest named Martin Luther ultimately separated from Rome and launched the reformation now initially Luther tried to stay in the catholic church and try to work from within but he was being attacked vilified there were rumors of assassinations and kidnappings they wanted to kill him but initially he tried to work within

Roman catholicism but it became very apparent to Luther that he couldn't do that he had to separate and it was tough on him it's hard to do he recognized something that the catholic church to this day denies I heard a guy on tv there is a catholic channel and I heard a guy a priest saying how Luther just totally missed it and we don't need a reformation we have the mother church meaning catholicism Luther recognized that people in the church at Rome were bound with chains and needed to be emancipated and we'll get into this next time but one of the things that brought him to that revelation was a journey he took to

Rome we're going to talk about that in some length he found this freedom the only freedom he could find was in the truth of justification by faith as taught in the Bible and we're going to talk about that how he found that very interesting!

the process he discovered that what Rome taught about justification and what the Bible said about justification were two different things they had really gotten off track there's no good place to end our lesson night but we have to because I want to expand more fully what brought Luther to the point of separating from Rome and that's going to be at least one lesson and maybe two and we're not going to do two more lessons tonight but I promise you when we look at that in the great reformer and by the way we are a product of that we can trace our roots back to northern Europe it's going to be very instructive for all of!